

Few can see past the speeches and the political battles to the doctor over there that is tending the infirm, and to the hospital that is receiving those in anguish, or feel in their heart painful wrath at the injustice which denies the miracle of healing to the old and to the poor.

Those injustices do not exist like they used to because of Medicare, but they still exist. Potentially, they are still out there. The old and the poor among us still seek help and healing, and it is still our responsibility to act not on political impulses but with human concern and compassion. It is still our responsibility not to be motivated by short-term politics but to be moved by the people who need Medicare, the people who count on the safety net to keep them from poverty, illness, and worse—death.

If we pay attention to those people, we will notice something else also. While Republicans are tripping over themselves trying to decide whether they want to kill Medicare, do you know who has not changed their minds at all? The American people. We are on their side. They have not wavered one inch. They have been as constant as the Republicans have been erratic. They have been consistent, and they have been clear: They do not want us to destroy their Medicare—their Medicare. We owe it to them to listen.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 3 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MINISTERIAL ARCTIC COUNCIL MEETING

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, last week, I was honored to participate in a very historic trip to attend the seventh ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Nuuk, Greenland. I attended with Secretary of State Clinton, as well as Secretary of the Interior, Secretary Salazar.

The Arctic Council was founded in 1995. It is an intergovernmental association. There are eight member states within the territory that is contained

within the Arctic Circle. The group includes Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation, and the United States. There are also six permanent participants representing the indigenous people of the region.

The trip was historic for a couple reasons. It was the first time a Secretary of State had led the U.S. delegation to the Arctic Council meeting. The fact that not only Secretary Clinton led it as Secretary of State but she was joined by a second Secretary, the Secretary of the Interior, certainly made that historic. It was also the first time a Member of Congress had attended the Arctic Council meeting.

We met with Foreign Ministers of the eight Arctic Council nations and the representatives of indigenous groups to discuss issues that are related to Arctic governance, climate change, and environmental protection. We watched the Ministers sign a historic search-and-rescue agreement.

The Arctic Council also increased its organizational structure. They formed a standing Secretariat that will be established in Tromsø, Norway. They also established criteria for the admission of new observers to the Council. The People's Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Italy, and the European Union are all seeking observer status to the Arctic Council, which might cause some to wonder why are all these non-Arctic nations interested in what is going on within the Arctic. I think that speaks to the evolving role of the Arctic in geopolitics in the world as we know it today.

The search-and-rescue agreement, the first ever legally binding agreement among Arctic states negotiated under the auspices of the Arctic Council, will strengthen the cooperation on search and rescue between Arctic states.

As the Arctic sea ice decreases, maritime activities are clearly on the rise in the Arctic. Aviation traffic is also on the rise as we see new polar aviation routes across the Arctic airspace in several directions. But limited rescue resources, challenging weather conditions, and the remoteness of the area render the operations difficult in the Arctic, making it very important that we have this coordination among the Arctic nations.

Under the agreement on the U.S. side, the Coast Guard will be the lead Federal agency for the search and rescue in the Arctic. While we applaud the role the Coast Guard plays historically—a very long, distinguished history of operating and conducting rescues in the Arctic—the current status of the Coast Guard's service and aviation fleets makes conducting search-and-rescue operations in the Arctic very challenging. With the scheduled decommissioning of the POLAR SEA, the Coast Guard will maintain only one—only one—heavy icebreaker in its fleet, and it is not expected to return

to service until the year 2013. They are doing some work on that vessel. While the Coast Guard does have a medium-endurance icebreaker, the HEALY, the cutter is clearly not equipped to handle the thick, multiyear ice that is present within the Arctic.

On the aviation side of the Coast Guard operations, the Coast Guard C-130 aircraft stationed in Kodiak, AK, are the only aircraft in their inventory that are capable to make the direct flights to the Arctic.

To give some sense of the scope, here is a map of the Arctic. The United States is up here. Everything is upside down. I apologize for that, but that is the way the world is. Kodiak is an island off the southern part of the State. Barrow is down here. This is where the air assets are stationed in Kodiak. To get to any search-and-rescue operations in the Chukchi Sea, in the Beaufort off Barrow or Prudhoe, it is over 900 miles. It is the same distance as the distance between Washington, DC, and Miami. If there were an incident in Miami, the helicopters would have to fly from Washington to get there to provide for the rescue.

Given the often harsh weather conditions in the Arctic, combined with a lack of infrastructure to provide for any forward deploying basing of helicopters, the Coast Guard's C-130s possibly can provide the search part of the rescue, but it is very difficult to get to the rescue site. This lack of maritime resources and shore-based infrastructure to protect our aviation resources places the Coast Guard and the United States in a difficult situation in the Arctic. Without concerted efforts and a focused policy for the Arctic, the United States and our Coast Guard are going to continue to be ill-equipped to conduct the search-and-rescue operations that are going to become increasingly necessary as amounts of sea ice continue to diminish and the levels of maritime vessel traffic increase. As former Admiral Allen, former Commandant of the Coast Guard, would say: I cannot discuss too much about climate change, but I can tell you there is more open sea that I am responsible for in the Arctic. We are clearly seeing that.

It has been projected that a seasonal ice-free Arctic Ocean was decades away and that maritime shipping through the Northwest Passage, through the Northern Sea route above Russia and direct transit across the Arctic Ocean was going to be few and far between. But last year, Russia sent a large ice-breaking bulk tanker through the Northern Sea route and across the Arctic, carrying hydrocarbons bound for Asia. The Russian Federation has received 15 icebreaker escort requests to provide navigational support through the Northern Sea route for this year. Compare that to last year when they only had three requests. We can see the level of commerce stepping up.

Transit through the Northern Sea route or the Northeast passage, as it is